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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4386
INFO RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3370
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3318
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
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UNCLAS KABUL 005666

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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PRT/QAL-E NOW: REBUILT AIRSTRIP IMPROVES LIVES

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Spanish PRT recently upgraded the Qal-e Now airstrip to increase the Spanish Military's ability to support and supply the PRT during the upcoming winter months. The project was conducted by the Spanish Agency for International Development (AECI), which trained local staff and provided construction equipment that will be donated to the Provincial Government. In addition to increasing the accessibility to Badghis (one of the country's more remote provinces), the project has provided critical training and experience to local workers. As locals begin to see the successful execution of reconstruction projects, this will reinforce the idea there is a positive alternative to rule by warlords and the Taliban. END SUMMARY.

New Airstrip Increases Access, Supports Relief Effort

12. (SBU) On November 20, AECI finished upgrading the provincial capital's dirt airstrip to a concrete runway capable of year-round operation. The airstrip is 25 meters wide by 2,000 meters long, and there are plans to add an additional five meters to the width at an unspecified later date. The upgrade was completed in less than three months and it enables the Spanish Military to better supply and support the Qal-e Now PRT during the fast-approaching winter. The PRT is already using the new runway to deliver flood relief supplies and it will use the newly-constructed storage sheds adjacent to the airstrip as the primary staging point for the flood relief effort. (Note: In mid-November, heavy rains in Murghab District resulted in flooding that affected at least 21 villages. Several dozen people were killed, and over 4,000 people needed assistance with food and shelter. Blankets, tents, and several metric tons of food aid were shipped to the affected area. End note.)

Donated Construction Equipment Give Locals Vital Tools

13. (SBU) The project utilized 17 pieces of heavy construction equipment, including several cement mixers, a grader, steamroller, vehicle-borne crane, fuel truck and a mobile vehicle-repair shop. All of this equipment is slated to be turned over to the provincial government in the near future.

The PRT has already constructed a facility in Qal-e Now to house the construction equipment once the handover takes place. AECI provided equipment maintenance and usage training as well as resources needed to make equipment repairs to local staff so they will be able to maintain the fleet of equipment in the future. The provincial government will assume all payroll costs for local equipment repair and staff to perform maintenance in the near future. AECI will continue to support the storage facility with spare parts. This support is intended to provide provincial leadership with the ability to undertake future development projects without AECI involvement.

PRT Trains and Employs Locals in Reconstruction

¶4. (SBU) In accordance with the PRT's policy to increase local work-force capacity, 90 percent of the 50 employees who worked on the airstrip upgrade were local hires. Five Spanish contractors provided oversight and management to the locals, and AECI provided 15 days of training and orientation to the local workers prior to commencing work to familiarize them with the equipment and provide basic skills needed to complete the project successfully. Local staff now know how to use the soon-to-be donated equipment and are prepared to undertake a wide-range of construction projects that would require their construction machinery.

COMMENT

¶5. (SBU) The runway has greatly improved the Spanish military's ability to support and supply Qal-e Now, but the long-term impacts of the project are more civilian than military. As often noted by provincial leadership, the runway is a prominent symbol of foreign donor commitment to the province as well as a sign of the province's efforts to modernize and connect with the outside world. Those involved in the current flood relief effort are already using the runway as the center for relief efforts, even as the construction workers clean up the area and add the finishing touches. In the long run, perhaps the greatest impact of the airstrip will be the development of the province's capacity to conduct future projects. The provincial government has the machinery needed to enable them to launch their own projects, and can use local workers who have the experience needed to operate that equipment. The ability to conduct reconstruction projects is essential to expanding GOA's reach, especially to the more remote provinces. It demonstrates viable progress to locals and improves their daily life. As locals in these provinces begin to see the successful execution of reconstruction projects, this will reinforce the idea that the GOA offers a positive alternative to rule by warlords and the Taliban. END COMMENT.
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